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AUTHOR Ford, Sondra
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ABSTRACT

A portrait of future North American society is painted, and the role of formal education within that society discussed. The importance of adaptability as a means to meet the needs of a changing society is stressed. Open education and an increased attention to cultural pluralism within the educational structure are encouraged, and a discussion of emerging sociocultural patterns as they relate to educational development is provided. (LH)

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REDRESS THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Sondra Ford, Ed.D.
Assistant Professor
Department of Instruction
and Learning
College of Human Development
and Learning
Murray State University
Murray, KY 42071

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REDRESS THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

In a long ago kingdom an emperor was forever seeking exquisite new garments to dazzle the constituency and celebrate the quality of existance in that time. In his search for more perfectly designed attire, he became deluded by his own illusion. If you remember the story, he paraded the streets in "finery" seen only by the bright and capable of the day. Since most dared not admit to ignorance or inefficency, the counsel and commonfolk alike excused his nakedness. It took a child who was naive enough of allegience to systems to wonder aloud why they would continue to celebrate when the king was stripped of his vestment. Even when the child awakened the general public to the charade, the sovereign said, "All the same I have to go on with this as long as the procession lasts."

In the eyes of many the educational priesthood has been defrocked. Why this lack of trust? The information explosion, coupled with our technological advances, sociological shifts and problems of an economic slump puts our own educational parade under the magnifying glass for all citizens to judge. There is no doubt that the rapidly doubling (every five years) body of knowledge, along with our expanded capacity for knowledge manageability, flings us into an era of abundance. Yet, we see a proverty-stricken situation where schools seem unable to adequately transfer the skills necessary for coping with intellectual, emotional, physical, and moral dilemmas of our time.

We are reminded of the illustration of pike and minnows cohabiting. Put some pike in a large tank of water. Put some minnows in the tank, too, but keep the pike and minnows separated by inserting a glass shield between them. The pike will naturally go for the minnows, since they dearly love to eat them. But they won't get them, because they will bump into the glass

partition. The pike will keep trying -- five times, ten times, maybe even fifty times. Then they will give up. When they give up, remove the glass partition. Now the minnows will swim freely among the pike -- who are still hungry. What happens next? The pike will not eat the minnows. Pike will even starve to death with all that food around them. Why? They have it in their heads that they cannot get to the minnows. And even though the conditions which led to their origianl failure have been changed, the pike still can't get it into their heads that the minnows are now available. It's frightening to realize that we could have this abundance of nourishment in the midst of alarming need. And if these discrepancies are apparent today, they will become glaring incompatibilities in the world of tomorrow.

Certainly in the world of the near future, education will be of supreme importance. Why then would we mock the school system which has tried so diligently to serve us? Looking at time-tested systems one is reminded of another honored institution and a parallel can be drawn. In religion, when one focuses on the temple and the codification of words, salavation becomes a sterile mockery. When one focuses on the institutional preservation of school and loses sight of the dynamic learning/growing process created by the ingestion of knowledge, then we sing a dirge to the past. I'm afraid our schools have so fossilized as to insulate society from learning, just as religious codes have sometimes celebrated the law instead of the spirit.

Schools survival depends upon a willingness and capacity to change its image. If schools could be seen as an institution of transformational vitality they could become the vanguard in designing a healthy new decade. The vitality can be described as the disintegration of one way of experiencing the world followed by the reorganization of this experience - a reorganization which now includes the new realization of the world.

Schools can internalize the needs of the 1980 mileau and in turn nourish society but that transformation must begin now. Just awakening and reacting to the kalaidescopic sense of our world is only a first step toward becoming an active partner in the creative design of tomorrow.

What then does this world look like as we hurl into the 80's? Sociologically, our population and its needs are changing in some of the following directions. Fewer children are being born, in fact some sociologists suggest that school enrollment will drop by about 25% if we continue to define school population as 6 to 18. Student population is shifting from the Mid-Atlantic and Pacific states to the South and Southwest. The family is becoming less of a factor in the socialization of the child. Teenage childbearing is up. Divorce and serial marriage become the norm. According to many projections, close to 45% of all children born in 1976 will live with a single parent for some time before reaching age 18. More and more women are entering the job market. The home/school relationship shifts as traditional family patterns change. The increasing number of healthy people over 60 indicates that the retirement mindset is wasteful. These patterns suggest that many new modes of living and thinking must be assimilated. The multiplicity of new stimuli bombarding people alienates most of us from the moorings of a more familiar world. And the rapidity of the bombardment results in a tremendous amount of stress now being experienced by many segments of the population.

Add to this stress a great deal of distrust and a sense of powerlessness. Consumers have expressed concern that businesses are cheating them with the cooperation of government. The general worker feels that big business, the social security system (which s/he feels they may never cash in on) and tax programs in general all plot ways to erode their dollar. Business persons feel that they are paying enormous taxes and dealing with constant

harassment and restrictions. The government officials feel they are being pulled to pieces by special interest groups. These frustrations lead people to a stage of ineffectuality and impotence. Many simply drop out of societal involvement in a productive way by use of drugs (both prescribed and otherwise) and alcohol.

Now if we haven't already painted a time of confusion, let us add the economic trend. Economists suggest that the long term (45-60 year) economic cycle predicts a 1980's depression. We are poised on the threshold of a slump similar to the 1930's. Our overcapacity, excessive debt, growing interest rate, and inflated dollar all describe a post-extravagant society. Outrageous hydrocarbon costs precede the end of an era where our livestyles were dictated to by our dependence on petroleum controllers. These rising costs directly affect our use of energy, heating and transportation. In turn, all budgets, both personal and institutional, will have to incorporate these adjustments as they occur.

While we make the mentioned sociological and economic adjustments there are also tremendous new technological capabilities to comprehend. Humanity is fast becoming global in communication and interdependence. Computers will transform our existence. They are becoming less expensive and increasing their capacity each year. They serve us with large data bases for efficient storage and retrieval of information. The cost of electronics has gone down 30% a year and the cost of information storage has reduced 50% each year since its inception. The electronic library and home based computer (both receiver and transmitter) will put learning at our fingertips in our own time frame and environment. These teaching machines will be within the realm of possibility for most citizens. Home learning packets can be designed as national education television networks expand and develop interactive programs and the video disk becomes a popular household item. Who now is

taking responsibility for developing these directions? Certainly the growing mass media industry is taking advantage of the technological advances plus the public's attraction to the medium. They are constantly researching the interest of the consumer because they are in business for profit. We cannot overlook the power of these teaching tools and partners as we seek to design better ways to do what needs to be done in the transfer of knowledge.

It seems that this transmission of knowledge is the life force for building maximum human potential. People need to become responsible caring decision makers and to do this they have to be informed -- of facts, alternatives, consequences, and procedures. With a good foundation of knowledge and the practice of applying this to relevant problems people can be nurtured into personal impowerment.

To provide that empowerment we have found nothing superior to the educational principles set forth by the 1927 National Congress of Parents and Teachers. These seven cardinal principles:

health
command of fundamental processes
worthy home membership
vocation
citizenship
worthy use of leisure time
and ethical character

all serve as well planned building blocks for shaping future maximum potential. However, these principles need a new framework to accomplish the intended results. Our present design is no longer cost efficient, relevant and cognizant of contemporary human values.

We offer an alternate design of the educational system. The model includes interfacing of schools (as we now know them), corporations, and media technology to get intended societal results without duplicating costs and effort. These educational consortiums would serve as data, research, and development centers where they consistently identify and disseminate

promising programs.

Drawing liberally from Robert Weber we propose a model which moves . . .

From . . .	To . . .
closed systems	open systems Note: A diffused learning environment proposes that school buildings be used by more people (varied population) at varied times of the day and year. Also it means taking learning into parks, museums, libraries, homes, public buildings, offices, and guidance centers.
inefficient information transfer (test and teacher funnel)	educational technology and humane teachers in some practical mix
arbitrary curriculum	full life involvement including apprenticeship, conscription service, and student interest
white middle class values	cultural pluralism. Note: We are global persons-interdependent in our dynamic reciprocity.
mass education-look step	individually paced education differences including early identification and prescription.
rote learning	discovery learning. Note: The expansion of factual knowledge will be replaced by strategies for making uses of the information processing capabilities of the environment.
K-12	Early childhood development through adult education. Note: Certain learning processes will become integral to good parenting. These skills can be taught to those trained to work with children-babysitters, day care center personel, as well as parents. The beginning of life is newly preceived as important to the development in the areas of emotional, physical, and intellectual futures. Therefore, infant education may be done by loving parents. Longer life and vocational shifting

From . . .	To . . .
	occupational education taking on new credibility (businesses already recognize this. In 1975 business spent $10 billion dollars on training programs.) Life long learning is imperative. No longer can we fragment the learning process
"Cells and bells"	home, anytime learning
passivity of learner	active learner
cognitive focus	conative, sensory, affective, and cognitive balance
fragmentation of facts subject areas	unity and synthesis of knowledge; interdiscipline problem-centered study
memorization/regurgitation	learning to learn
attendance/course completion compulsory	challenge exams- focus on result-the achievement of attitudes, skills and abilities regardless of where learned
student dependence upon teacher stimulus	receptivity enhancement of learning (chemical/electrical)
booklearning	media, multisensory discovery

The strength of an institution is composed of competent learnership, continuous planning function, scattering of power and authority on the basis of ability to produce and free and dynamic movement of current ideas into the planning. A self renewal management system for these consortium centers will expedite the genesis of this new design as it tends to be pro active in its approach to change.

To accomplish this change we obviously need learning managers. These people will be the most crucial element in the development process. They will be trained to design, and manage resources and learning experiences. These professionals will be active participants in the curricular decisions. The training programs for these self actualizing managers will focus on skill and attitude development.

The relevant skills we recommend include: resource management, problem solving, analyzing, synthesizing, evaluation, communications training, decision making, goal setting, creativity development, counseling, valuing, and development of alternative routes of transferring ideas. Attitudes needed include: trust in student ability, autonomy, compassion, flexibility, sensitivity to self and others, ability to incorporate dichotomies, and assertiveness. This teacher training could be received at the educational consortiums in conjunction with experience in real learning/teaching situations.

We can build and perpetuate humane systems through humane processes. We propose that these more humane processes and systems be instigated right away to alleviate the costly waste -- the waste of personal potential and the waste of money. The imperatives of human values and cost effectiveness underpin all that we seek. We must realize that the destiny of humanity is molded by the problems we confront.